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British police dismantling part of Irish Travelers camp site following clashes with occupants

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LONDON — Irish Travelers on Thursday began leaving a site in southeast England where they have lived illegally for a decade, ending days of fierce resistance and a lengthy legal battle against authorities who forced their eviction.

Authorities earlier Thursday began removing homes and dismantling protesters' scaffolding from Dale Farm to force out the Travelers, a traditionally nomadic group similar to, but ethnically distinct from, Gypsy or Roma people.

The conflict over the site on fields about 30 miles (50 kilometers) east of London has simmered since 2001, when Travelers bought and settled on a former scrap yard next to a legal Travelers' site. The legal battle dragged on for years until the Travelers lost a final appeal last week. Local authorities say the 86 families lack permission to pitch homes on the land, but the Travelers call it ethnic cleansing.

Paul Davis, of a campaign group called Dale Farm Solidarity, said some residents planned to relocate to a smaller neighboring legal site, but the group would lobby local authorities to offer them other plots to move to.

Evictions of Travelers are relatively common across Britain, but few are as large, or as high-profile, as this one. Dozens of activists supporting the Travelers' cause have camped out at the site, many throwing bricks and other missiles at police as officers and bailiffs moved in to take control on Wednesday.

Police said 34 people have been arrested since the operation got under way.

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